

NATIONAL DEFENSE
AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I rise to give my overall support for the content of the Defense authorization bill, but my considerable concern and, therefore, my “no” vote on final passage in the Committee on Armed Services was because the bill, as crafted by the majority in the committee, is a travesty, using an artificial budget to authorize the necessary operations and troop readiness of our military establishment.

Now, that is what the bill does. It is an artificial budget. That may not sound particularly offensive, particularly when as a policy bill there are many good things in this Defense bill; things such as providing for the increase of our military services; things such as certain weapons systems that are authorized.

Historically, this bill has been recognized as being bipartisan, and it addresses the problems posed by an increasingly dangerous world. The Defense authorization bill has historically provided the military with the resources our Nation needs. But the ranking Democrat, the Senator from Rhode Island, and I are compelled to oppose this bill because it addresses these problems with an artificial budget that treats an essential part of our military, which is preparedness—the necessary operations training and maintenance, preparedness of our military—in an unplanned way. They are treating it as an expense by sending it over to an account that is not even on the budget—an account called overseas contingency operations or the funds for what used to be the Iraq war and is now the winding down of the Afghanistan war. This is an unbudgeted item—operations readiness, training—necessary for our military to be ready, and they are taking it out of the Defense Department budget and sticking it over here. Now, that doesn’t make sense.

Some might say: Well, why in the world would they do that? Because folks around here are concerned about something called the sequester, which is supposedly an artificial limit on keeping expenditures of the Federal Government below a certain level. That may sound like a good thing, if it is done with legitimate numbers, but when in fact you are creating that artificial limit pressing down on Federal spending, but you take a major part of that Federal spending out and put it over here in an unaccounted-for account that doesn’t reach those budgetary caps, that is nothing more than—I will put it politely—budgetary sleight of hand. I will put it more directly: That is budgetary fakery. Therefore, this Senator is going to oppose the bill.

The Senate Committee on Armed Services has received testimony from military leader after military leader—chief master sergeants, generals, admirals—who have said the policy of this arbitrary budget cap called sequestration is harming our national security

and is putting our military strategy at risk.

Our strategy is not just dependent on defense spending, but it is very dependent upon nondefense spending, which in this bill is not even being addressed because that artificial ceiling—the sequestration—is like a meat ax right across the Federal budget. That is affecting—and every one of those military leaders will tell you—that is affecting our military preparedness.

These arbitrary budget caps impact this nondefense spending. It keeps us from providing funds for other agencies that are so essential to the national security. The Coast Guard, they are out there in the war zone. They are in another war zone down in the Caribbean as they are interdicting all kinds of drug smugglers. What about the FBI, the CIA, the DEA, Customs, Border Patrol, Air Traffic Control, TSA? All of those are affected and affect national security.

So if we are going to continue to budget like this, the result is going to be more budget uncertainty for our military, and it is going to end up bleeding funds away from our military readiness.

What we are doing is we are avoiding the obvious. The obvious is working around to bring those numbers down under those artificial budget caps. So it is time for us to get rid of the sequester. We did it before, 2 years ago, with a bipartisan budget—the one known as Murray-Ryan. We need to do it again. Otherwise, right now, we are wasting our time working on bills that have no chance of becoming law. We need to fix the budget caps for defense and nondefense spending. You do not use a bandaid when you have an artery that is gushing blood.

Now, it is not just this. There are other examples. Take, for example, a program that I have some familiarity with—our Nation’s space program. We have been trying since 2010, since Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, a Republican from Texas, and I passed a NASA authorization bill that put us on the course that will ultimately, as the President has now announced, take us to Mars. But we can’t get the policy updated because we can’t pass another NASA authorization bill. So what happens? It goes to the Committee on Appropriations. Thank goodness we have folks such as Senator SHELBY and Senator MIKULSKI who direct that.

But now what is happening to appropriations bills? They are being put under this sequester, and, because of that, it is going to be hard in this Chamber to get 60 votes to pass appropriations bills. As a result, we are going to be in near cardiac arrest right at the end of the time, during a continuing resolution, which is no way to run a railroad when you appropriate money. We have to come to the altar and realize what we are facing, and that is this artificial budgetary cap.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following speakers in morning business be limited to speak for up to 5 minutes each: Myself, Senators GILLIBRAND, MANCHIN, and MARKEY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 1521

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I rise today to support amendment No. 1521, which would limit the use of overseas contingency operations, or OCO, funds. I am proud to be a cosponsor of this amendment, which was filed by the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator JACK REED.

I wish to start by thanking Senator MCCAIN and Senator REED for their leadership in producing the underlining bill. Drafting the National Defense Authorization Act, NDAA, is no small task, and I support many important provisions included in the bill. As Ranking Member of the Seapower Subcommittee, I worked with Chairman WICKER to include provisions that will strengthen and support our Navy and Marine Corps.

Every Defense bill presents challenges and tradeoffs. There are competing priorities and compromises. For 52 consecutive years, both Chambers have debated the details and come up with a product that supports and enhances our national security. However, this year’s bill presents more than just a difference over details. The overall framework of this bill is a problem. Before us is a bill that presents a serious question about our national values—a question that the Reed amendment would help to answer.

Earlier this year, the Republicans pushed through a budget resolution. That resolution clearly set forth the framework that Chairman MCCAIN had to work within. That framework basically said: We are not going to address sequestration in a meaningful way. Instead, we are only going to provide sequester relief for the defense budget. I note that this budget resolution passed the Senate without a single Democratic vote. I ask my colleagues to join me in objecting to an approach that bifurcates sequester relief as though our country’s national security lies only with the Department of Defense, because that is what this NDAA bill does. How? The bill before us takes \$38 billion out of the base budget at the Department of Defense and moves it into the OCO budget. The OCO budget is not subject to Budget Control Act caps. The reason for this is that OCO funds are intended to support the unknown unknowns that arise during our security operations abroad. Using the OCO account to fund noncontingency items is irresponsible. It is a 1-year fix, and it adds to our budget deficit. It is not fair to our commanders on the ground, who